
Press Release

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MOVING SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FORWARD: LOCAL LEADERS GATHER TO DISCUSS REGIONAL TRANSIT CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENT

LOS ANGELES – March 20, 2008 – More than 200 local elected officials and transportation leaders from across the region met today in an effort to identify and highlight new solutions to the challenges of the transit industry at the Southern California Association of Governments Regional Transit Summit: “Envisioning Regional Transit's Future.” The summit calls for better financial, economic and land use strategies to enable the transit system to meet increasing regional transportation demands. This first-ever transit event sponsored by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) was created in response to growing demand from the transit industry to offer information on system development and best practices.

“Transportation affects everyone, and one of the major goals of this summit is to exchange ideas on solutions that will maximize the use of transit and minimize dependence on the single-occupant vehicle,” said San Bernardino County Supervisor and SCAG President Gary Ovitt. “We need to address many issues, including overcrowding, gridlock, congestion and fuel costs, and my challenge to you is to take home the ideas we discuss today to build a new and better future in Southern California.”

“We need smart growth,” said Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. “To address this issue and to ensure that working men and women have access to all the opportunities Los Angeles has to offer, we must expand our transit network. This means we need to dramatically expand our network not just in Los Angeles, but throughout the region. If we do nothing – the transportation costs, the lack of productivity and people moving away from Southern California because of traffic congestion and air pollution – then all of these things will become more and more significant.”

Regional leaders highlighted the past decade of transit successes but stressed the need for a number of policy and land use strategies to further address growth challenges. The summit

included a panel of elected officials discussing local and regional transit policies and included Barstow Mayor Lawrence Dale, Moorpark Councilmember Keith Millhouse, Orange County Supervisor Chris Norby, Los Angeles Councilmember Bill Rosendahl and La Quinta Councilmember Terry Henderson. Los Angeles Councilmember Wendy Greuel and Santa Monica Councilmember Pam O'Connor also participated in a transit funding panel.

“Transit is a critical connection to many other issues within our region, including goods movement, air quality, housing, the environment and population growth,” said Hasan Ikhata, SCAG’s Executive Director. “Our regional future as an economy and community depends on it, and we need to build up key communities to be more accessible to jobs and services with more walking, bicycling and transit use.”

Panelists also discussed the unpredictability of state transit funding and new ways to protect essential transit funds and to expand future resources. A constant theme was how the transit industry must work in tandem with other planning projects to reduce greenhouse gases, conserve energy and meet the needs of a growing population that live large distances between the home and workplace. Participants also talked about ways to encourage public transit use and looked at other successful transit developments around the country for insight to such community issues as parking and security, ease of access, luggage, reliable schedules, facilities, environment and street design. The role of transit technology and how to improve operational performance by reducing delays and total travel time also were key topics.

The public transit network in the SCAG region has grown significantly over the last two decades but still faces serious, unprecedented challenges. Rising gas prices and transit growth rates that outpace highway growth indicate a prime opportunity to increase transit ridership, and local leaders and transportation partners were urged to support regional investments in new transit modes and innovative services to help achieve a higher share of the traveling public.

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